

Message Text

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DEPARTMENT ALSO PASS AID/NESA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAGR, ENGR, PK

SUBJECT: BAD NEWS ON TARBELA WATER

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 4943

(B) ISLAMABAD 8422

1. SUMMARY: DURING BRIEFING ON NATIONAL WATER AND POWER SITUATION FOR COUNTRY DIRECTOR CONSTABLE, ECONOFF RUMRILL AND ME SEPTEMBER 15, WAPDA CHAIRMAN TARIQUE EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT THAT "LESS TARBELA WATER THAN EXPECTED WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR IRRIGATION AGAIN THIS WINTER." PROBLEM THIS TIME STEMS FROM FACT THAT REPAIRS TO STILLING BASIN BEHIND TUNNELS THREE AND FOUR, ORIGINALLY THOUGH ABLE TO BE COMPLETED BY NEXT MONTH, WOULD NOW TAKE UNTIL NEXT MAY. THIS WOULD REQUIRE KEEPING CLOSED TUNNELS THROUGH WHICH ALL IRRIGATION WATER WOULD HAVE BEEN RELEASED, RELYING INSTEAD ON DRAWDOWN OF LIMITED QUANTITY OF WATER FROM TOP OF RESERVOIR OVER SPILLWAYS, WHILE IT LASTS. CHAIRMAN OPINED WATER AVAILABILITY WOULD HARDLY BE 40 PERCENT OF WHAT HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED FOR WINTER IRRIGATION. THIS PORTENDS, WHEN PUBLICLY KNOWN, ADVERSE EFFECT ON PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND MORALE, AND SUBSTANTIAL SETBACK IN PLANNED EXPANSION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN COMING RABI (WINTER) SEASON. END SUMMARY.

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2. NEA/PAB COUNTRY DIRECTOR CONSTABLE, ECON OFFICER RUMRIL AND I CALLED ON WATER AND POWER DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (WAPDA) CHAIR-

MAN MAJOR GENERAL SAAD TARIQUE SEPTEMBER 15 FOR GENERAL BRIEFING ON PAKISTAN'S WATER AND POWER SITUATION. AT OUTSET OF TOUR D'HORIZON (OTHER ASPECTS REPORTED SEPARATELY) WE ASKED CHAIRMAN FOR LATEST READING ON SITUATION AT TARBELA DAM. TO OUR SURPRISE HE REPLIED, IN HIS USUAL DIRECT MANNER, HE WAS VERY DISAPPOINTED THAT "LESS TARBELA WATER THAN EXPECTED WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR IRRIGATION AGAIN THIS WINTER."

3. WHEN WE SHOWED SURPRISE AT THIS REVELATION (WHICH WE HAD NOT YET HEARD STATED SO AUTHORITATIVELY), HE EXPLAINED PROBLEM THIS YEAR STEMMED FROM SERIOUS CAVITATION AND EROSION DISCOVERED LAST MAY IN "STILLING BASIN" BEHIND OUTLETS TO TARBELA TUNNELS THREE AND FOUR. DAMAGE HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN THOUGHT REPARABLE IN A FEW MONTH' TIME BUT HAD NOW BEEN FOUND TO REQUIRE MORE EXTENSIVE REPAIRS. CEMENT FLOOR OF STILLING BASINS HAD COMPLDRELY ERODED IN SEVERAL PLACES CAUSING HOLES AS MUCH AS 70 FEET DEEP. THEY HAD TO BE FILLED WITH CEMENT UNDER WATER, THEN CAPPED WITH REINFORCED CONCRETE, A DIFFICULT AND TIME-CONSUMING JOB.

4. FOR THESE REPAIRS, TUNNELS THREE AND FOUR WOULD HAVE TO BE KEPT COMPLETELY CLOSED OR EROSION COULD WORK ITS WAY UP THE BASIN AND INTO TUNNELS THEMSELVES. WORK NOW UNDERWAY WAS ESTIMATED TO TAKE UNTIL NEXT MAY TO COMPLETE. SINCE VIRTUALLY ALL THE WATER FOR IRRIGATION THIS COMING RABI (WINTER) SEASON WAS EXPECTED TO BE RELEASED INTO INDUS THROUGH TUNNELS THREE AND FOUR, THEIR CLOSURE UNTIL NEXT MAY WOULD MEAN THAT ONLY WATER AVAILABLE FOR IRRIGATION WOULD BE WHAT COULD BE RELEASED OVER SPILLWAYS NEAR TOP OF DAM. WHILE RESERVOIR IS NOW QUITE FULL, AT LEVEL ABOUT 30 FEET ABOVE TOP OF SPILLWAY (RETAINED BY SPILLWAY GATES), IT WOULD HAVE TO BE RATIONED CAREFULLY, WITH RELEASES MUCH LESS THAN WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN AVAILABLE THROUGH TUNNELS. ONCE RESERVOIR IS DRAWN TO LEVEL OF SPILLWAYS, THERE WOULD BE VIRTUALLY NO WAY OF RELEASING WATER EXCEPT WHAT MIGHT BE ADDED THROUGH WINTER RAIN.

5. WE ASKED IF ANY WATER MIGHT BE RELEASED THROUGH TUNNELS ONE AND TWO, NOW BEING CONVERTED FOR POWER GENERATION. CHAIRMAN REPLIED THEY WERE NOW COMPLETELY CLOSED FOR INSTALLATION OF FIRST GENERATORS, TO BEGIN NEXT MONTH, AND WOULD ONLY BE OPENED IN EXTREME EMERGENCY, I.E., TO SAVE DAM ITSELF. AFTER FIRST GENERATORS ARE INSTALLED,
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SMALL AMOUNT OF WATER WOULD BE RELEASED THROUGH TUNNELS ONE AND TWO, WHOSE STILLING BASIN WAS STILL INTACT, BUT THIS WOULD BE LITTLE HELP FOR IRRIGATION.

6. WE THEN ASKED HOW MUCH LESS WATER WOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR IRRIGATION UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THAN IF TUNNELS THREE AND FOUR HAD BEEN USED. HE REPLIED THAT WITH CAREFUL MANAGEMENT ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF PLANNED IRRIGATION WATER FROM TARBELA MIGHT BE MET DURING WINTER SEASON. HE ADDED THAT SITUATION WOULD NOW REQUIRE DOWNWARD REVISION OF ALLOCATIONS OF TARBELA WATER TO THE

PROVINCES, THAT SITUATION HAD NOT YET BEEN REVEALED TO THE PUBLIC AND HE DID NOT KNOW WHEN IT WOULD BE.

7. LATER IN CONVERSATION, WHEN DISCUSSING POWER GENERATION, CHAIRMAN MENTIONED THAT FIRST TARBELA GENERATORS COULD HAVE BEEN INSTALLED NEXT MONTH, BUT WORK HAD BEEN SUSPENDED PENDING RECONSIDERATION OF VARIOUS INTERRELATED PROBLEMS AT DAM, ESPECIALLY STILLING BASIN REPAIRS. INSTALLATION OF GENERATORS WOULD THUS BE DELAYED. ON POSITIVE SIDE, HE SAID PROBLEM OF SEEPAGE THROUGH BLANKET OF RESERVOIR HAD BEEN BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL.

8. COMMENTS: WE HAVE KNOWN ABOUT DAMAGE TO STILLING BASIN AND NEED FOR EXTENSIVE REPAIR SINCE LAST MAY (SEE MY MAY 15 MEMCON WITH AMERICAN WAPDA CONSULTANT ON "REPAIRS TO TARBELA DAM," AND ISLAMABAD 6798 STATUS REPORT ON TARBELA). WHAT WAS NEW TO US WAS EXTENSION OF TIME REQUIRED FOR REPAIRS AND ITS ADVERSE EFFECT ON AVAILABILITY OF WATER FOR WINTER IRRIGATION.

9. SHORTLY AFTER INTERVIEW WITH CHAIRMAN WE SAW POUCH COPY OF ISLAMABAD AIDAC 8422 (WHEELER CONVERSATION WITH KAZI) IN WHICH SECRETARY GENERAL FINANCE REVEALED THAT ONLY 1.6 MILLION ACRE FEET OF TARBELA WATER LIKELY TO BE AVAILABLE FOR WINTER IRRIGATION BECAUSE OF "NEWLY DISCOVERED DAMAGE TO SPILLWAYS." UNLESS DAMAGE HAS OCCURRED IN TESTING SPILLWAYS OF WHICH WE UNAWARE, BELIEVE KAZI MEANT REFER TO STILLING BASIN PROBLEM. HIS MENTION OF SPECIFIC QUANTITY OF WATER IS USEFUL AND WE WILL ENDEAVOR ASSESS ITS SIGNIFICANCE THROUGH OUR SOURCES.

10. AUTHORITIES HAVE MANAGED SO FAR TO KEEP THIS BAD NEWS FROM PUBLIC NOTICE. CENTRAL MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING ON TARBELA, TO WHICH CHAIRMAN FLEW AFTER OUR INTERVIEW, WAS NOT EVEN MENTIONED IN
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LOCAL PRESS. NEW SITUATION IS LIKELY TO HAVE STRONGLY ADVERSE EFFECT ON PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND MORALE WHEN ANNOUNCED OR LEAKED TO THE PRESS, AND IS CERTAIN TO CAUSE SUBSTANTIAL SETBACK IN PLANNED EXPANSION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN COMING RABI SEASON.
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